

# Anti-bullying



## school policy

revised 2001

## Introduction

Good behaviour is best developed in a community that nurtures self-respect and concern for others. The school, as a community, must make every effort to foster good behaviour. However, this cannot be done in isolation, but as a part of a wider community. The primary responsibility for the development of good behaviour rests in the home, with parents and guardians, where children spend most of their time. Good behaviour is best achieved when parents, teachers, members of the school's Board of Management and pupils are aware of, and respect, the role each must play in the development of good behaviour. The school's behaviour charter is based on the principle of such mutual respect.

## Definition

Bullying can be physical, verbal or emotional and may be carried out by groups or by an individual. Name calling, teasing and taunting, rude gestures, intimidation and extortion are some of its forms. Bullying can be understood as a subset of aggressive behaviour, and can cause both physical and emotional hurt (INTO, 1993).

Three criteria particularly distinguish bullying.

1. The hurt done is unprovoked, at least by any action that would normally be considered a provocation.
2. Bullying is the repeated and continuous intimidation and victimisation of one child by another.

The child who is doing the bullying is generally thought of as being stronger because the victim is not in a position to retaliate effectively.

The occasional fight or quarrel between two children of equal strength is not considered bullying.

## Children who may be vulnerable to bullying

- those who are over-protected;
- children who are new to a class or school;

- children who are different in physical appearance, speech (e.g. accent), or social background to classmates;
- those with low esteem (often compounded by victimisation);
- those who are more obedient, mild mannered, easily-led, accommodating and submissive than peers;
- victims who are shy, timid, sensitive, anxious, isolated (which can be seen as independent or unfriendly) or have poorly developed social skills;
- those who are provocative or attention-seeking;
- victims may be academically successful or experience learning difficulties.

#### Possible bully traits

Potential bullies may:

- be academic underachievers or overachievers;
- be unpopular or insecure;
- be assertive, aggressive, extrovert;
- lack empathy with others;
- tend to lack feelings of guilt by rationalising behaviour;
- often be physically bigger or stronger than victim;
- tend to be heedless or happy-go-lucky;
- be adventurous, 'thick-skinned' and socially forward;
- often be group dependent.

#### Possible signs that a child is a victim of bullying

- ISPPCC/National Parents Council (Post Primary) and Eastern Health Board (1993)

Children may:

- be frightened of walking to or from school;
- be unwilling to go to school;

- beg parents to drive them to school;
- change their route to school;
- begin to do poorly in school work;
- come home regularly with clothes or books damaged or missing;
- come home starving (because their lunch was taken);
- become withdrawn or start stammering;
- become distressed and stop eating;
- become anxious and evasive when asked if they have a problem;
- cry themselves to sleep;
- have nightmares;
- have unexplained scratches, cuts or bruises;
- constantly ask for, or steal, money (to pay a bully);
- begin to bully other smaller children;
- give improbable excuses to explain any of the above.

In order to prevent bullying and to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust among teachers, parents and pupils, the following code is followed.

#### Code objectives

1. to teach children how to deal with bullying;
2. to teach children that bullying of others is not acceptable;
3. to aid parents and teachers in their dealings with bullying;

#### Parents' / guardians' guidelines

In all situations:

- be aware of victim / bully traits;
- give their child opportunities to talk about feelings/problems;

- avoid behaviour that might, inadvertently, encourage bullying, either as perpetrator or victim - overt discussion of other pupils and their family circle in front of children may provide ammunition for a potential bully;
- contact class teacher and school principal if bullying is suspected - it is important that parents and teachers work together for a resolution;
- never encourage their child to engage in violent behaviour, but to be assertive and to report a problem - this is more positive and effective;
- always remain in close contact with the school.

If your child may be a victim of bullying:

- advise the child always to get away from the bully and tell an adult whom they trust;
- be aware of the rules of the Stay Safe Programme which are **'Say "No!" Get away! Tell and keep telling!'**
- encourage your child to be positively assertive;
- invite the child's peers to visit / join a family outing;
- keep an account of suspected incidents - this will aid assessment of the seriousness of the problem.

If your child is suspected of bullying:

- don't panic, this may be a temporary response to something happening in your child's life;
- do not punish by becoming bullies yourselves;
- over a period of time, talk to your child in an attempt to discover if there is a problem and explain how the victim felt;
- use every opportunity to praise good, considerate, helpful behaviour;
- if the situation is serious, ask the school or family GP to refer your child to the child guidance clinic for help;

### Children's guidelines

Children should be aware:

- that bullying is any action which makes another child uncomfortable;
- that bullying is wrong because it hurts someone else;
- that they should report to a parent/teacher if they continually feel threatened, embarrassed or frightened by somebody;
- that they should report to a parent/teacher if they see someone being bullied.

In school:

- tell the teacher on playground duty if the incident has occurred during playtime;
- tell your class teacher of incidents at other times.

### General teachers' guidelines

- be aware of victim/bully traits;
- remain alert to possible bullying incidents in the playground or the cloakroom as well as in the classroom;
- be aware of own role model as presented to pupils;
- avoid continually praising or assigning special duties to one pupil, as this may have an adverse effect on the rest of the class.

### School/teachers' response policy

1. If a victim reports bullying to a teacher, it is vital that the case is fully and confidentially investigated and followed up if necessary.
2. If a child reports that somebody else is being harassed by one or more children, the teacher shall approach one of the bullies, saying that he/she saw something nasty happening in the yard, though stressing that nobody has reported this incident and that they hope that it will not happen again. One bully usually relays this message to any other bullies.

3. In more serious cases, the teacher shall speak separately to the bully and the victim, pointing out the injustice and undesirability of this behaviour. These separate interviews will enable the teacher to form an opinion on the personalities of the pupils concerned. The bully shall then be confronted by the teacher with the victim, without others present, initiating a discussion on what the victim felt like when bullied. This may have the effect of making a bully realise the full impact of his/her actions. However, if the bullying has been severe and ongoing, the victim may feel unable to face the bully. In this case a meeting will be suggested only when the teacher senses that the victim is confident enough to proceed. In extreme cases, such a meeting may not be deemed feasible at any stage.

4. If a teacher suspects that bullying is taking place, (eg if the teacher notices one pupil with whom nobody wants to work/share a team) the teacher may have to insist that the pupil be allowed to join a particular group. Afterwards the teacher shall interview privately and discreetly either the isolated pupil or another pupil. Evidence of bullying may emerge.

5. If a case of bullying is witnessed by a teacher, he/she shall:

- remain calm, reacting emotionally may add to the bully's fun and give the bully a feeling of control;
- take the incident/report seriously;
- take action as quickly as possible;
- consider whether action needs to be private or public;
- query - Who are those involved? What are the circumstances?
- reassure the victim, ensuring that they don't feel inadequate or foolish;
- offer concrete help, advice and support to the victim;
- make disapproval plain to the bully;
- encourage the bully to see the victim's point of view;
- sanction the bully if necessary, being careful not give the impression that it is all right to bully if you have the power, or if you do not 'get caught';
- clearly explain the sanction, and the reason it is being given;
- explain sanctions to the class.

6. Inform the principal and other teachers of a bullying incident, in order to avoid recurrence.

7. Principal and teacher together shall inform relevant sets of parents calmly, clearly and concisely, reassuring them that the incident will not linger on or be held against an individual. Secondary schools to which pupils transfer will be informed by the principal of relevant information in this regard if there is a suspicion of recurrence.

8. The principal shall inform the Board of Management of serious instances of bullying. The Board will suspend persistent bullies.

9. Records will be kept of all meetings and correspondence regarding bullying incidents and allegations.

### **References**

INTO (1993), *Discipline in the Primary School*, 16/93  
ISPCC / National Parents Council (Post Primary), *Stop Bullying*  
Eastern Health Board (1993), *Stay Safe Programme*

### **Acknowledgements**

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Sticks and Stones (1994), *Programme Handbook*  
Whitechurch National School (1994), *A Code of Behaviour*

Board of Management  
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